

Veterans' Health Today

SUMMER 2009

This Way to
Good Health

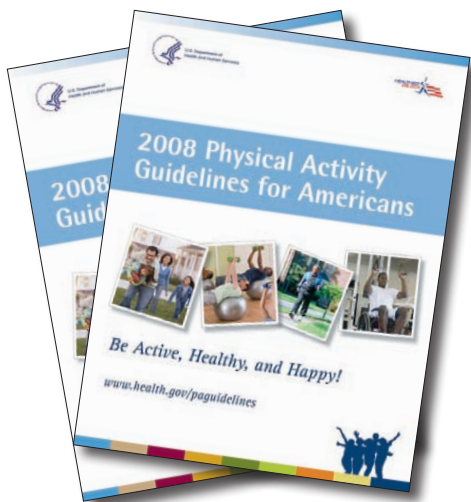
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This Way to Good Health

Guidelines Provide Direction for Physical Activity

At the end of last year, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published the *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, a handbook with tips and advice to help Americans live a more active, healthy lifestyle. According to René Haas, Patient Education Coordinator at VA Long Beach, the main new objective of the guidelines is to encourage Americans to exercise a total of 150 minutes per week. The previous guideline was 30 minutes a day.

The goal of 150 minutes can seem like a big challenge. Fortunately, the 2½ hours of physical activity can be achieved in a range of ways to fit different lifestyles and levels of fitness. For example, if you enjoy watching TV, lift soup cans or walk on a treadmill while watching your favorite show. If you like to walk your dog, increase your distance or walk more than once a day. “You can get the time in however it works for you. It can be in 10 minute segments or all on the weekends,” said Haas.

If you have not been living an active lifestyle, you may need to begin slowly. “Just walking is a good place to start,” said Haas. “You don’t have to run a marathon—begin with a 10 minute walk and build up from there.”

If you are already active, set a new goal to increase your time spent exercising. Try a new activity. Everyone can benefit from an active daily life!

To view the *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* online, visit www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/default.aspx.

The recommended 150 minutes of exercise per week applies to moderate-intensity activities, like walking or riding bicycles. If you do more vigorous activities, such as running or aerobics, only 75 minutes per week is required. High-intensity activities count as double-time!

Try these activities from the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans:

- Walking
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Water aerobics
- Jogging
- Aerobic exercise classes
- Bicycle riding (stationary or on a path)
- Gardening activities
- Tennis
- Golf (without a cart)

24 Hour Fitness Memberships for Veterans

The VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network has recently contracted with 24 Hour Fitness Clubs in southern California and southern Nevada to provide Veterans and their families a special discounted membership rate starting at \$19.99.

Enrollment Made Easy:

To be connected to the nearest club please call 800.224.0240, OR enroll online at: <http://www.24hourfitness.com/corp/vadesertpac> (enter code: 100825).

If you have questions, contact Rhonda Beard at rbeard@24hourfit.com, or contact your local club at 800.224.0240.

ROAD TACTICS



Safe Driving Awareness for Returning Veterans

In the first few years after coming home from deployment, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for Veterans.

When service members are deployed, there are many transitions they must make to adjust to their new surroundings. In the same way, service members returning home must again alter their frame of mind to function post-deployment.

One issue for these new Veterans to cope with is the daily danger on our Nation's roadways. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, there were **34,502 U.S. traffic fatalities** in 2007. If that number isn't frightening enough, the risk of motor-vehicle death for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans is 75 percent higher than for the general population.

It is important for Veterans to re-train their thinking from a combat zone mentality to driving in a normal, safe environment. When Veterans retain a battle mindset, it is easy to be aggressive on the road. Driving during deployment requires a survival mode, often requiring high speed and unpredictable, adrenaline-induced responses. These behaviors can result in unsafe habits when returning home. Aggressive driving behaviors to beware of are:

- ▶ Driving too fast and speeding through intersections
- ▶ Tailgating other vehicles
- ▶ Changing lanes quickly and without signaling

Getting In Gear

NASCAR legend Richard Petty, a VA Honorary Spokesperson for safe driving, helps remind returning Veterans how to drive safe through these tips:

- ▶ Don't drink and drive.
- ▶ Don't ride with a drunk driver.
- ▶ Always wear your seat belt—whether driving, in the passenger seat, or in a back seat.
- ▶ If you ride a motorcycle, always wear a helmet and ride sober.

- ▶ Cutting off other vehicles
- ▶ Expressing anger at other drivers

Veterans having difficulty controlling driving frustrations can visit VA for counseling or other transition services.

It is an unthinkable tragedy for a Veteran to lose his or her life in a traffic crash after returning safely from combat. To find out more about saving lives and safeguarding the roadways, visit www.safedriving.va.gov.

VA Expands Eligibility

VA eligibility rules changed on June 15, 2009, making it easier for more Veterans to enroll in VA's health care system. New provisions allow Veterans who have incomes above previous thresholds by 10% to receive VA health care. Veterans are encouraged to contact VA's Health Resource Center at 1-877-222 VETS (8387) or visit www.va.gov/healtheligibility for more information.





Health Care at Home

Jane Austen said, “There is nothing like staying at home for real comfort.” For many Veterans, this idea holds true, but they need extra support to keep it that way.



To assist Veterans needing help in their home, the VA provides a variety of community-based programs, as well as resources for family members or informal/unpaid caregivers who assist them. Stephanie Ross, VA Caregiving Program Manager, says the VA works with Veterans to provide the right care in the right place at the right time. “VA home health care programs support quality of life in the preferred environment, which is usually the Veteran’s own home,” said Ross.

To accomplish this, there are many different types of services for Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system; however, each facility offers a different variety of

programs, depending on needs and community resources. These programs support both the Veterans and their loved ones who provide for their continued care.

Respite Care

According to the National Alliance for Caregiving, over 44 million Americans aid in the care of a relative or friend. Most often these individuals are disabled or suffering from a chronic illness, such as dementia or Parkinson’s disease. “As an illness progresses, the Veteran’s needs increase and often the responsibilities of the family care provider also increase,” says Ross. These duties may include transportation, personal care (bathing, toileting), medication reminders, household chores (cooking, cleaning), and a variety of other needs that can become overwhelming.

To help the caregiver, VA offers Respite Care, a short-term care program for Veterans. “The services are designed to provide a break or some relief from the demands of daily care giving,” said Ross. There are many

There is a new Caregiver Assistance Center on the My HealtheVet website. The center gives the caregiver access to information about a variety of illnesses, plus links to community resources. To access the resource, visit www.myhealth.va.gov. Click on the icon on the right to go to the My HealtheVet site. Next, click on Research Health, then Healthy Living Centers, and then Caregiver Assistance.



different ways in which the care is offered. It can include a Veteran's short stay at a VA Community Living Center or a Community Nursing Home, daily time spent at an Adult Day Health Care Program, or an in-home aide is arranged to stay with the Veteran.

Respite Care is provided for up to 30 days a year and planned in advance. Ross suggests 15 days twice a year for a family caregiver to fully benefit from the program. For Respite Care, the Veteran must be enrolled in VA health care. Ross recommends contacting a social worker to begin the process. "Every medical provider has a team working along with them, and there are social workers who can initiate and coordinate the respite request," said Ross.

Homemaker/Home Health Aide Program

The VA also supports Veterans needing personal care with in-home aides. The Homemaker/Home Health Aide Program provides Veterans with individuals that can visit a few days a week to help with activities like bathing and dressing. This service may allow Veterans who qualify for a nursing home to remain in their own home. Ross adds that "Usually a coordinator will complete an assessment to make sure the home setting is appropriate and safe for the Veteran."

Additional Programs

There are many other VA programs available to assist struggling Veterans with continued care in the home. For example, Home-Based Primary Care provides nurses, rehab therapists, social workers, and dieticians to educate patients and caregivers regarding the patient's care such as

medications, procedures, diet, and assistance with obtaining medical equipment and community resources.

There is also Care Coordination/Home Telehealth, which uses new technology to monitor a Veteran's health from their home. Through this program, a Care Coordinator can evaluate a chronically ill patient each day without requiring an appointment. (More information is available at www.carecoordination.va.gov.)

In addition, Veterans can even receive equipment from the Prosthetics Department. Wheelchairs, walkers, shower chairs, and many other devices are available upon recommendation from VA medical providers.

Still, many Veterans and their caregivers do not know where to begin to get access to these programs. "Seeing a social worker is a really great place to start," said Ross. If you are a Veteran or a caregiver and would like to find out more about VA home health care, contact the Social Work Department at your local VA facility to see what the VA can do for you.

AN INFORMAL CAREGIVER is anyone who assists with the needs of a Veteran who is ill or disabled. Challenges for the caregiver may include demands of personal care, emotional stress, financial stress, difficult behavior, and guilt from feelings that they're not doing enough, no matter how much they do. VA social workers can help family caregivers deal with these struggles.



Online and In Control

My HealtheVet Helps Veterans Manage Their Health

Each week more than 181,000 Veterans across the country are signing into My HealtheVet, VA's online Personal Health Record, to become more involved in their personal health care. Patient Education Coordinators across the VA are excited about the new features.

What are the most popular features?

The features Veterans seem to use most often are the "Pharmacy" and "Research Health" tabs, where they can order pharmacy refills online and receive them by mail. They can also learn more about their illness.

There are also online Wellness Reminders that encourage preventative medicine. For example, reminding Veterans to get flu shots or a colonoscopy, or reminding Veterans with diabetes that they need a foot exam. The Wellness Reminders are based on what the doctors see in the patient's medical record. It helps the patient see what the doctor sees. The idea is to be Veteran-centered. It encourages patients to self-manage their care and allows them to know what they need for their personal health care.

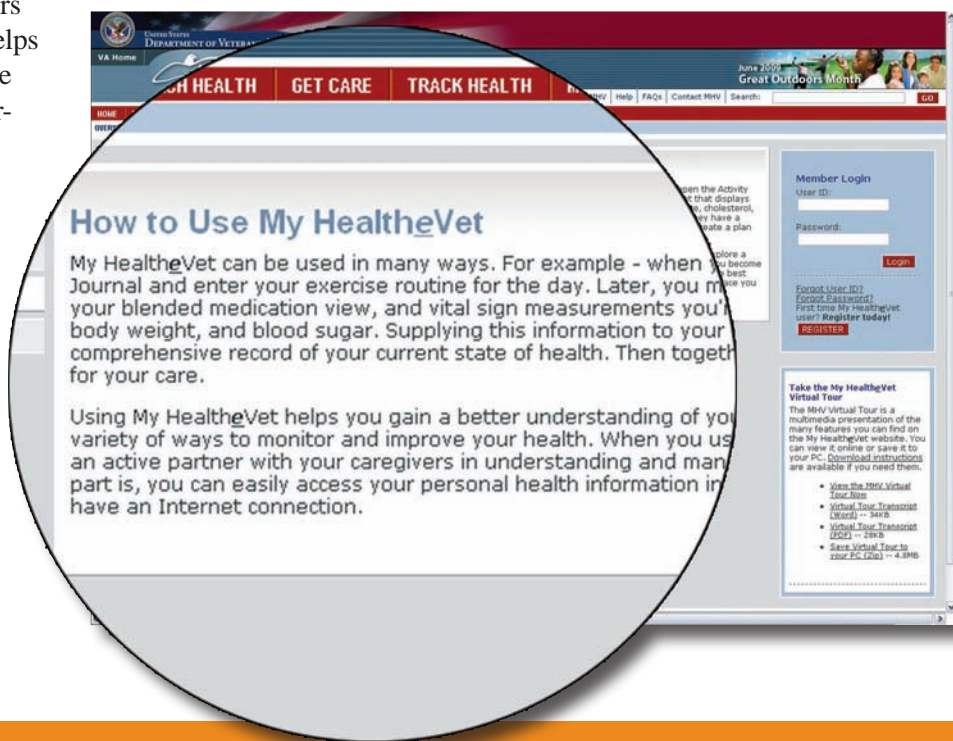
What else is new on the site?

There are three new Learning Centers in the "Research Health" tab under "Mental Health." One is called "Managing Your Triggers." This is, for example, for someone who has PTSD to help them identify what might set off an issue of anger or flashbacks. Another one is "Succeed at Work," and the third one is

"Manage Your Stress." Reminders for appointments will be coming out in late 2009 or early 2010, and patients will be able to view their lab results online in 2010. VA Long Beach Medical Center is one of the test sites for these, and the Veterans who have it, love it!

How do Veterans get a My HealtheVet account?

On the www.myhealth.va.gov site, there is a link that says "register here." Veterans can simply click to register, selecting their own username and password. It only takes about 10 minutes to register. If a Veteran gets care through the VA, there is a section under personal information where the Veteran can identify him or herself as a VA patient, linking them to their patient information once they complete in-person authentication (IPA).



www.myhealth.va.gov



What do Veterans need to complete the In-Person Authentication process?

Come into the VA or one of the outpatient clinics and show your ID card to verify your identity. You'll also watch a 10-minute video or get the written transcript of it, and then fill out Form 10-5345A, a release of information form for My HealtheVet electronic medical record information. This allows you to see the names of your medicines as well as selected Wellness Reminders.

How do Veterans get signed up for the Wellness Reminders?

Log-in to My HealtheVet and go to the "Get Care" tab. There is a tab you will be able to see if you are logged in and have done the IPA process. The tab says "Wellness Reminders." There,

you can elect to receive personalized choices, such as which reminders you would like to display.

Who can Veterans contact if they have any questions?

On the Web site there is a button that says "Contact MHV." That is the absolute best place to get help. Through contacting the help desk, you can send a secure message email and they will contact you back with answers.

Find out more about My HealtheVet at www.myhealth.va.gov.

Suicide Hotline for Veterans



Suicidal ideas and attempts to harm oneself are the result of problems that may seem like they can't be fixed. Together, Vet Centers and VA Medical Centers stand ready to reach out and help Veterans at risk for suicide.

If you feel you are in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and indicate you are a Veteran. You'll be immediately connected to VA suicide prevention and mental health professionals.

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Ave., Suite 110
Corona, CA 92879-3123
951-734-0525

East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard
Suite 150
Commerce, CA 90022-5147
323-728-9966

Las Vegas Vet Center

1919 S. Jones Blvd., Suite A
Las Vegas, NV 89146-1299
702-251-7873

Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard
Suite 150
Gardena, CA 90247-4129
310-767-1221

Orange County Vet Center

12453 Lewis Street, Suite 101
Garden Grove, CA 92840-4680
714-776-0161

San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140
San Bernardino, CA 92408-3305
909-890-0797

San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue
San Diego, CA 92103-1003
619-294-2040

San Marcos Vet Center

1 Civic Center Drive, Suite 140
San Marcos, CA 92069-2934
760-744-6914

Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618
818-892-9227

Ventura Vet Center

790 E. Santa Clara, Suite 100
Ventura, CA 93001-2964
805-585-1860

West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230-6615
310-641-0326

Veterans' Health Today

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This publication is provided as a service to enrolled Veterans in So. California and So. Nevada.

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